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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003607

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: DEPUTY COR SPEAKER BLOWS HOT AND COLD ON PENDING
LEGISLATION

REF: BAGHDAD 3567 (LEGISLATIVE UPDATE)

Classified By: Political Counselor Matt Tueller for Reasons 1.4 (b and d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Council of Representatives (CoR) First Deputy Speaker Khalid al-Attiyah told us October 30 that he is guardedly optimistic that the CoR will approve a 2008 national budget and the De-Baathification Law before it adjourns for a two-month recess in late December. He stated that Kurdish intransigence over a draft Hydrocarbons Framework Law and fundamental philosophical differences among Sunnis on one side and Shia-Kurds on the other regarding the Provincial Powers Law make progress on those two bills unlikely in the near term. Khalid attributed the slow pace of progress not to factors inside the CoR but rather to lack of consensus among Iraq's top political leaders which has a direct impact on the legislative process. We pressed hard for timely CoR enactment of all key pending legislation, emphasizing intense high-level USG interest in this matter. Khalid was noticeably pumped-up after his success earlier that day in obtaining speedy CoR approval of Prime Minister Maliki's technocrat nominees for Ministers of Health and Agriculture to replace Sadrist who had resigned their positions several months back, the first time the CoR had ever voted on and approved replacement ministers. End Summary.

CoR Outlook: Optimistic on De-Baath and Budget

¶2. (C) We opened by registering USG frustration over stalled benchmark legislation, reminding Sheikh Khalid of keen high-level USG interest in legislative progress. Unabashed and unapologetic, Khalid attributed the slow pace of movement not to factors inside the CoR but rather to a lack of consensus among Iraq's top political leaders. CoR members follow the directives of their bloc leaders, he maintained, and agreement among bloc leaders will result in CoR action. He did not reply directly to our point that August agreement among Iraq's top five leaders over the outline of key legislation had not translated into CoR enactment of such legislation. He noted that President Bush had expressed frustration about the slow pace of legislative progress when he met with Khalid and other GOI officials last month on the margins of UNGA.

¶3. (C) Khalid expressed guarded optimism that the De-Baathification Law (Law on Accountability and Justice) would be passed before the CoR begins a two-month recess in late December. He said the Shia United Iraqi Alliance, the Sunni Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), and Kurdish parties had "agreed in principle" on a draft that was now before the De-Baathification Committee (headed by a Sadrist) for review, after which it will be sent to the floor for debate and a vote. He identified Tawafuq as the primary opponent of the De-Baathification Law, even though he also claimed Tawafuq bloc member IIP was a bill supporter. Khalid also predicted

that the CoR would likely approve a 2008 national budget before the end of the year. We pressed Khalid to follow-up to ensure CoR ratification of both items prior to recess.

Pessimistic on Hydrocarbon and Provincial Powers Laws

¶4. (C) Khalid stated that the Kurds stand in the way of the Hydrocarbon Framework Law. He said the Kurds insist the CoR should only consider a draft that was approved by the Council of Ministers last February, and oppose a competing draft approved by the Shura Council because of their disagreement with provisions regarding exploration and development of new fields. He singled out Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani as the primary obstacle. Regarding the Provincial Powers Law (Law on Governates Not Formed Into Regions), he said there was a major dispute between a group that wants to de-centralize power (read the Shia and Kurds) and a group that wants to broaden central government power (read the Sunnis). He said this issue will take time to resolve, and suggested the USG bring pressure to move it along. He said a draft law on provincial elections was still on the drawing board. Khalid responded with interest to our offer to provide technical assistance to the CoR to help build capacity in legislation drafting and tracking. He warned, however, that any such assistance was "sensitive and must be handled with wisdom" so as to avoid the appearance of USG meddling in the policy-making process. He suggested that assistance be provided by an NGO such as NDI rather than the USG.

CoR Approves Two New Ministers

¶5. (C) Sheikh Khalid was visibly buoyant after his success

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earlier in the day in extracting CoR approval for Prime Minister Maliki's technocrat nominees for Ministers of Health and Agriculture to replace Sadrists who had resigned their positions several months back. Khalid explained that this was the first time the CoR had ever voted on and approved replacement ministers. Even though the nominations were not on the CoR agenda and Maliki had not previously announced the nominations, CoR Speaker Mashadani allowed Khalid to aggressively rush the nominations forward and call for a vote over procedural objections from Tawafuq, the Sadrists, and a few others. Khalid told us the objections were not made in good faith, but rather were attempts to mire the process in political wrangling that had nothing to do with nominee qualifications. In the end, the nominees were approved by an overwhelming majority - even the Sadrists praised the nominees - and Khalid noted with a smug grin that many Tawafuq and Iraqiyyah members voted in the majority.

¶6. (SBU) Hussain Ali Bahadili, the new Minister of Agriculture, occupied the same position during the Iraqi Transitional Government. A Shia Arab, he is not formally affiliated with a political party. He was born in 1943, received Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Plant Diseases from Baghdad University, and earned a PhD in the same field from the University of California-Davis. Like Bahadili, new Minister of Health Saleh Mehdi al-Hasnawi is said to be a Shia Arab technocrat unaffiliated with a political party. While we have not seen his biographical information (we are not alone in this, as Khalid curtly refused to allow CoR members an opportunity to examine nominee resumes prior to the vote), he reportedly has a degree in psychology from Baghdad University's College of Medicine, taught at the University of Babel, and held various positions in the Ministry of Health including a stint as MOH Director for Karbala.

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